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ABSTRACT

Following introductory material, this document presents a rationale for experiential learning. Service-learning programs and internships in North Carolina are described in light of their objectives, the role of agency colleagues, the role of faculty counselors, the students, and criteria for evaluation. (MJM)

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Introduction

I want to think with you this evening about a new way to approach education and service. It is also a vision of sorts; and where to begin our thinking is perhaps in asking why students in this culture are not the most logical place to begin realizing this vision. Most of us would acknowledge that a significant portion of students within our society are alienated. The signs of this alienation are many: extensive drug use, long hair, and the development of communes and other intensive communities. Just as critical, although not as evident, there is an increasing uneasiness about the possibilities for one's future emotional and intellectual growth. This uneasiness is evident, for instance, in the general reluctance of students to enter public life.

Several factors have been consistently advanced as causes of this alienation. One historian, Richard Hofstadter, has suggested that a determining factor is the lack of a sense of vocation among youth in American society (see Newsweek, July 6, 1970). This lack can be attributed partially to a technological culture in which the products of one's work are increasingly less visible. Related to Hofstadter's analysis is another which

attributes alienation to the fact that youth are denied responsibility and that their entry into meaningful public roles is prevented for too long a period. An increasing number of students, however, view the life and values of American society as not so meaningful and even bankrupt. Thus, the entry into public life is an unwise investment of their energy and commitment.

Experiential Learning

One means of getting at the source of this alienation is to examine in greater detail the criticism of the manner in which we educate ourselves. I would like to suggest that our current educational approaches possess at least three basic deficiencies. The first deficiency is a result of our seeming inability to recognize that learning is a constant in the life of every individual and that experience itself can be the subject-matter of education. The pattern of formal education implies that one's competence to enter public life is certified in the receipt of a degree. We recognize that a man has been adequately trained by simply having acquired some technical skill or that he has been made more human by having been exposed to the cultural and intellectual traditions of Western civilization. Both modes, and especially the latter (which is considered the more liberal and humane), assume the necessity of communicating some

body of knowledge which is then appropriated by the individual and utilized to meet the demands of his own experience. I believe that this assumption is falacious since it is similar to maintaining that human life proceeds deductively, that is, that human action is always a result of the application of some principle. One thing which I began to sense, in my theological seminary days, from current movements in philosophy and psychology was that all philosophical inquiry and thought begins with human experience. In many instances, formal educational practices have failed to recognize that life proceeds inductively. As a result, we have failed to learn from the generators of the culture which educational institutions are responsible for transmitting. For instance, the content of Kant's thought and argument is taught without the realization that his philosophy was derived inductively from his attempts to make sense of his experience. If we are truly interested in our educational processes in developing humane and competent people, a more sensible way to proceed would be to enable students to learn to examine their own experiences as creatively and as critically as possible. Besides proceeding from a false assumption, formal education, in fact provides little opportunity to learn how to learn or how to solve problems other than those which are hypothetical. Only a small percentage of university and college education involves questions

of life styles and process understanding or examines how institutions influence behavior. Most of the current emphasis in education is on factual information, content delivery and the preparation of specific skills. Research tells us that within five years this kind of education is either forgotten or outdated. This loss to society and the individual is a result of the failure to recognize that learning is a constant factor of human experience from birth to death. I believe that educational relevance occurs when individuals begin to deal competently and compassionably with their experience of the world.

Cross-Cultural Settings

A second deficiency of formal education is its lack of emphasis on cross-cultural experience. The exposure to other cultures and life styles through the mass media is indeed high. Yet, it is ironic that our understanding of other behavior patterns and cultures is minimal. This irony is due largely to the fact that the exposure to other cultures is passive. I would maintain that only by living in cross-cultural contexts and by experiencing other behavioral patterns and modes of thought does an individual become aware of cultural distinctions and of the values which are uniquely his own. In many instances, formal education has failed to recognize the educational validity of cross-cultural experience. However,

if one's goal becomes learning how to learn, then such experience is not only valid but essential. Whether in an Indian ashram, a black community in Charlotte or eastern North Carolina, in the management arm of a large business, or in a mental health facility, the immediate and direct confrontation of other ways of viewing reality would have as its product the appreciation within the individual of shared values as well as of genuine differences. Properly engaged in, cross-cultural experience enhances as an individual's ability to proceed inductively and to conceptualize on the basis of his experience of the world. In a study of Peace Corp training, (Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, Vol.3, No. 4) Roger Harrison notes that training programs employing the instructional methods of formal education left trainees ill-prepared to adjust quickly to life in other cultures and to conceptualize on the basis of their experiences. A recurring phenomenon among Peace Corp returnees was also their inability to do more than simply exchange "war stories." Harrison attributes this inability to the fact that most of their education had not been spent dealing intellectually with their concrete experience.

The study also suggested that this inability was due to more than simply a lack of previous cross-cultural experience or an emphasis within formal education on modes of learning other than experiential. The major deficiency which Harrison

noted was that few Peace Corp trainees had been prepared by their formal education to cope with the high degree of autonomy demanded by life and problem-solving in Peace Corp environments.

Student Initiative and Autonomy

I believe that this lack of emphasis on developing autonomy and on fostering student initiative is a third deficiency of formal education. Students in our society have been taught with authoritarian supports for such a significant portion of their lives that they find the going exceedingly difficult when they are forced by necessity to teach themselves. In formal education, as it is currently structured, students are told what to do and how to do it as well as what is important and what is unimportant. One very dangerous result of this directive approach is that the educational system will produce people who are willing to have things decided for them. In spite of what could be said in its favor, the present system of education is not committed to creating confident people whose learning is self-generated.

Service-Learning in North Carolina

These criticisms of formal education as it is currently conducted reflect what is behind the learning side of service-learning internships. I have argued in these remarks that an

emphasis on experiential learning, cross-cultural settings, and student initiative and autonomy is necessary. But I feel very deeply that this kind of education is also the most exciting and rewarding primarily because its assumptions about the nature of learning and being human involve service as a natural consequence. Most universities are not in the business of granting academic credit to students working to solve immediate and indigenous community problems. Within formal education, a premium is placed on dispassionate analysis, which most often results in unrealistic and abstract concerns. I am sure, however, that students' concerns are never as humane and realistic as they are when these concerns grow out of direct contact with people who have problems. Service-learning internships have as their intent the development of open, flexible, competent, learning and caring individuals. Although criticisms of non-experiential modes of education entail an emphasis on the self, this emphasis is balanced within the concept of service-learning internships by the necessity for service and by the recognition that it is only in "giving a damn" about the brother that one's own experience, however well-conceptualized, can begin to have meaning.

These thoughts about a new way to approach education and public service provide a conceptual framework for the North Carolina Internship Office. The Department of Administration and the Board of Higher Education of North Carolina State

Government are cooperating in providing basic support for the NCIO. The basic assumptions and objectives of this office are:

1. College students are a significant source of manpower for meeting public needs in North Carolina, and we seek to provide student manpower for public service.
2. The world of public agencies and needs beyond the classroom is a learning environment that is grossly underutilized, and we seek to foster this understanding.
3. We also seek to facilitate the development of institutional relationships and linkages which might enhance these primary objectives.

With a limited student staff, the NCIO is attempting to stimulate and foster programs that will provide service-learning opportunities for students at the State and local government levels. As a result of our objectives, we are also conducting research about the nature of the internship experience and examining the program goals and designs of at least twenty different programs that are operational in the State this summer. We are also attempting to provide some long range planning which might better enable the State to utilize student internship participation in State problems and to understand the Service-Learning concept.

At least ten internship programs throughout the State have emerged out of the service-learning concerns which I have been discussing with you, and another ten programs are actively utilizing student manpower this summer. Five hundred students along with 2000 PACE students constitute a fine beginning by State government in providing opportunities for young people to become involved in public issues in the State. You at Charlotte are part of this effort.

We have been delighted that this university and the public agencies of this area have begun to respond so favorably and so capably to the kind of service-learning activity that we in the NCIO are committed to supporting and encouraging. Your activities have a ring of authenticity in that they have been locally determined and are locally administered and you have local students dealing with local problems. This design from an administrative point of view appears to be a commendable model and many others are beginning to hear about your enterprise and express interest in it.

From an educational point of view, those of you who are participants in the internship processes, either as student interns, faculty counselors, or agency colleagues, have an immensely exciting opportunity. For if you accept the argument presented tonight, you have to all three see yourselves as learners. And you are involved in this opportunity because of your own decisions and because there was something useful to do.

Role of Agency Colleague

For those of you who are agency colleagues (about the public business) and have a student or two interning with you, a fantastic educational responsibiiity rests upon your shoulders. For you have defined a task within an overall mission that you and the intern believe can be accomplished in a 10-12 week period. You are, as a result, providing the experiential context for the service and learning of a student. In most cases, the student will not have been exposed to the cultural styles of public agencies and is therefore in a cross-cultural setting just by being in your agency. It is my hope that both you, the agency colleague, and the students recognize the immediate worth or usefulness of the task being pursued and are equally aware of the possibilities for significant learning. To be so aware demands some time and sensitivity. In order to find administrative ways for allowing the student to be as autonomous as possible, we recommend and have found effective the method of appointing students in service-learning internships as independent agents through independent contractual arrangement. That is, negotiate a contract with the student to perform a certain portion or work, state some educational objectives within the constraints of a time period and a given public environment. It is my conviction that by arranging this relationship, the task (the product) you want completed will be better accomplished and more helpful to the pursuit of your own objectives.

If the task is recognized by you as being important, if the cross-cultural aspects of the office routine or nature of the assignment are entailed, and if the intern is seen as having independent status, the host agency has in essence become the environment for the student to begin to find his way toward a service-learning life-style hopefully realizing the values inherent in the service-learning concept I've discussed. He has exercised a public responsibility around a specific need and has begun to see that he must be a caring-learning human being.

Role of Faculty Counselor

For the faculty counselor, I see his or her function as being an interpreter, that is, an interpreter for the student, for the agency colleague, for himself and for his academic colleagues. With the student he has an indispensable function in assisting with defining a carefully conceived task assignment. Too low or too high an expectation can be harmful. He can be available to the intern for the personal kinds of concerns that will arise. He can assist the intern in understanding the kinds of experiences he is encountering, the nature of cultural confrontation and support the student in his quest for self-directed, autonomous learning during the internship. With the agency representative, he can be available to represent the energies and talents of academia for dealing with public issues. He

likewise can be supportive of the learning environment that the world of public life presents. Too often the university-community dialogue never becomes dialogue, since the university provides its services from its storehouses of wisdom and rarely does the university recognize the educational uses of the world beyond the classroom.

Faculty, I believe, hold the key to educational reform be ause they generally hold the key to effective educational power. It is my growing conviction that if faculty members don't become more involved in experiential learning opportunities, their ability to remain credible will begin to deteriorate rapidly.

The Student

Even though I think being a local agency colleague and being a professor in these service-learning internships can be a highly intriguing and demanding enterprise, the real excitement for me is in what happens to a student who gets a taste of confronting an issue and seeing something happen as a result of his effort; to a student who begins to sense that his own limited exposures to life have been protective and begins to see the vastness and expansiveness and heterogeneity of human experience; to a student who begins to take charge of his own life; his own educational agenda and realizes that he can cause things to

happen rather than have them happen to him. This is excitement and one of the payoffs of the service-learning internship style.

Some Criteria for Evaluation

Each participant in the service-learning process--agency colleague, faculty member, and student--have immense opportunities if they can "put it all together." In this regard, I would like to suggest some questions which might be useful in measuring the success of the internship process:

First, are the students dealing with indigenous community needs? In other words, does the problem or task of the student have a sense of human importance about it?

Second, are we meeting those needs in inter-institutional ways? That is, are university officials, agency officials, and other public bodies cooperating through the internship process?

Third, are we "raising the level of dialogue" about the quality of life within the university, the community and the agency? Are the questions of "What is worth doing?" and "What is worth knowing?" being pursued with any vigor at all?

Fourth, are students beginning to deal with their own experience as interns and developing an awareness of the significance of experiential learning as a life-style possibility?

It is the hypothesis of the NCIO that through the student internship route which stresses the service-learning concept and internship design, these criteria can be met with varying degrees of intensity and success. Students can be the logical place to begin realizing a vision about the ways we can learn to "survive with style" in the following decades.

Risking Tragedy

It is my current understanding that you are making important strides toward meeting these criteria -- that there are many hurdles and misunderstandings ahead of you here and many insights to be realized and appreciated. Let me offer my strong encouragement for the part each one of you is contributing to this process. Corita Kent and Joseph Pintauro in their little book To Believe in Man, say "WE MUST BECOME NEW MEN OR BE SATISFIED AS WE ARE...EITHER WAY WE RISK TRAGEDY." I believe that through our mutual participation in student service-learning internships, we are on the frontier of becoming new men - for we are risking tragedy by trying to care, by being open, by attempting to become competent, by searching for ways to learn and by accepting public obligation.